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Featured Golf News

Capitol Hill's Senator & Legislator Take Back Seat to No Others on RTJ Trail

By: [Steve Habel](#)

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Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail - which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year - offers myriad options for memorable hours on the links. With a collection of 468 championship golf holes on 11 sites in nearly every corner of the Yellowhammer State, each facility seems to have a "featured" course, and all the locations except one (Ross Bridge in the Birmingham suburb of Hoover) has more than 18 holes.

So what's a golfer to do when scheduling a round (or two or three) at Capitol Hill in Prattville, a complex with three fabulous and very different 18-holers?

Capitol Hill's most ballyhooed course is the Judge, but its Senator course is good enough to host the Navistar LPGA Classic each year for the best women players in the world. And the Legislator course at Capitol Hill may be the toughest on the property, thanks to its routing through a Cypress swamp.

The facility certainly provides a wealth of golf riches, all just 13 miles north of Alabama's state capitol of Montgomery.

All three courses - heck, every hole on the RTJ Golf Trail - were designed by Jones protégé Roger Rulewich. Sometime when you've been on the Trail a few days, a feeling of déjà vu seems to settle in as you drive into the different parking lots and see the clubhouses; this is understandable since each of the structures were designed for simplicity and a sense of ease for golfers.

But once on the courses, each is different and never



No. 3 Green on Senator Course at Capitol Hill



18th Hole at the Legislator Course at Capitol Hill

more so than at Capitol Hill. With more than 1,500 acres here, there's ample room for plenty of variety and solitude.

A recent trip involved rounds at Senator - a Scottish-Links style course without a single tree in play, and Legislator, a more traditional track that winds through stands of pines and along a bluff that descends into vine- and moss-covered wetlands.

And despite the lofty ranking of the facility's Judge (Golf Magazine considers it one of the nation's top public tracks), Senator and Legislator take no second billing here.

Picking the Right Line is Key at Senator

Senator looks and feels like an Old World seaside links even though the nearest coastline is four hours to the south. Rulewich placed in excess of 160 pot bunkers around the layout and built mounds to create bounces both toward and away from fairways and to create a sense of tranquility.

Some of those mounds are 40 feet high. When the wind blows and the grasses are moving, you'll swear you can taste salt spray in the air.

Senator was the first of Capitol Hills' trio to open. It plays at a par of 72 and is carded at 7,654 yards from its back set of five tees, where it is rated 77.4 with a Slope of 134. Because of the dearth of trees and since it's routed on the site's highest ground, Senator is often



Legislator Course at Capitol Hill

buffeted by breezes, adding to its testy nature.

The back nine can take its pound of flesh, with four par-4s playing 448 yards or more from the tips. Add to that the 616-yard, par-5 10th and the 222-yard, par-3 16th and you get a home half that stretches 136 yards more than the front side (3,895 as compared to 3,759 yards).



The Senator Course at Capitol Hill

That's not saying that the outward nine is easy, what with its two par-3s of 230 yards or more and the 611-yard par-5 fifth, the course's No. 1 handicap hole.

Senator's rolling fairways seem narrow and shots hit off-line are often swallowed up by the knee-high grass atop the mounds. Like the putting surfaces at

seaside links, the greens are undulating and often elevated; some are hidden behind grass-covered dunes. In a tip o' the tam to St. Andrews, the par-4 third and par-3 seventh share a double green.

The key to playing Senator is taking aggressive and confident lines off the tee whenever possible. This allows for short irons into the slick greens.

Senator was named among the top-10 new courses in the nation by Golf after opening. The course can be penal, especially if the wind is up and the greens hard. But it's a blast to play and a real brain-teaser in course management.

Moss & Vines Make Legislator Just Fine


I was blown away by the routing of Legislator, which offers a little of each of the other tracks at Capitol Hill but is characterized by the wetlands, mosses and vines integrated into the six holes that play between and across a cypress swamp's creeks and ponds.

During a round at Legislator you'll swear you're playing a mountain track in Tennessee or North Carolina rather than in the middle of Alabama (and just down the ridge from the links-y Senator - the difference is mind-boggling). At Legislator, the golfer gets 200 feet of roll and elevation changes and a one-of-a-kind, winding "Sky Bridge" cart path to get down to the wetland holes.



No. 14 at Senator Course

Also opened in 1999, par-72 Legislator extends 7,477 yards, where it's rated 76.9. Its slope of 149 is second highest among all the Trail's offerings.

 On the front nine, players will liken Legislator with Senator's open feel, at least somewhat. It's here where Legislator offers wavier fairways, plenty of bunkering and holes ending at mostly large greens.

The round begins with the whopping 631-yard par-5, continues with the massive 481-yard par-4 fourth, ups the ante at the sixth - a water-logged, 603-yard three-shotter - and culminates at the 488-yard par-4 eighth.

The front nine is 237 yards longer than the back, which resembles the Judge course's more traditional tree-lined, lakeside traits.

Legislator's 412-yard, par-4 10th brings golfers down to the edge of the lake, while the 207-yard par-3 11th is fronted by a large pond at the fore and aft by a lake. Beginning with the 387-yard par-4 12th, the routing winds back up a wooded ridge.



**4th Green at the Legislator Shows
Some of Track's Moss & Vine**

The closing trio - the 182-yard par-3 16th, 585-yard par-5 17th and 424-yard two-shot closer - offer the best vistas of the lake and swamp 200 feet below.

Legislator demands accuracy, moxie and great play to achieve success. Of the nine RTJ Golf Trail courses I have played, it is my favorite.

Along with its three tough courses, Capitol Hill also features an innovative circular driving range that's 400 yards in diameter. The facility was named the No. 2 public golf site in the country by readers of Golf World; Capitol Hill in Prattville continues to get praises from golfers and golf writers alike.

Most of the facilities of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail (including Capitol Hill) are near an interstate or federal highway and directions to the sites are easily marked by distinctive green highway signs. The eight Resort Collection hotels on the trail fly the flags of Marriott or Renaissance and are tops for luxury, golf and spa experiences.

For more info, see <http://www.rtjgolf.com/capitolhill>.

Steve Habel is one of Cybergolf's world correspondents, contributing news stories, features, equipment and book reviews and personality profiles from his base in Central Texas. He also works as a contributing editor for Horns Illustrated magazine, a publication focusing on University of Texas sports, covers the Longhorns for CBS Sports, is regional editor for Texas Golfer magazine and files stories for Golf Oklahoma magazine, Texas Links magazines and Golfers Guide. Habel's main blog (www.shotoverthegreen.blogspot.com) features news on golf and the Longhorns, and another (www.checkinginandplayingthrough.blogspot.com) chronicles his many travels, on which he has played more than 350 golf courses since 2009. Habel is a member of the Golf Writers Association of America and the Texas Golf Writers Association.

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